

The Electric Mercury

U.S. Army Medical Command Electronic News Summary, April 2000

**For more on these and other important stories, see April 2000 printed issue of The Mercury.
This is a service of the Public Affairs Office, Headquarters MEDCOM.**

DoD plans boost in 2001 medical budget

The president's proposed fiscal 2001 defense budget calls for a 3.7 percent military and civilian pay hike, proposes eliminating out-of-pocket off-post housing expenses, and aims to fix the military health system. DoD wants the health budget boosted to address two access issues: providing TRICARE Prime for families of service members in remote areas and eliminating co-pays for service members using civilian facilities. Also sought is money for a pharmacy benefit for Medicare-eligible retirees and a custodial-care benefit.

DoD prepares policy on anthrax-shot exemptions

Officials are working to standardize exemptions to the anthrax-vaccination program. Exemptions are based on individual circumstances, not on any concerns about vaccine safety. Administrative exemptions cover soldiers scheduled to separate within 180 days, provided they are not in or likely to deploy to high-risk areas. Medical exemptions cover people who have had adverse reactions to anthrax shots, pregnant women, patients taking immunosuppressant drugs, and people with recent illness or surgery.

After 34 years, Vietnam soldier-medic gets Medal of Honor

Alfred V. Rascon's nomination for America's highest honor got lost in the 1960s. Upon learning that, one of the men he saved convinced the Army to revive the nomination in the 1980s. After a long drive to collect supporting evidence and an endorsement from both houses of Congress, Rascon was presented the Medal of Honor by President Bill Clinton this year. He earned the honor in War Zone D, north of Saigon, on March 16, 1966, as a soldier-medic in the 173rd Airborne Brigade.

Depleted uranium...why not to fear it

There's no reason to fear depleted uranium (DU) unless you're the enemy. As armor and as a way to defeat enemy armor, DU saves U.S. lives. It's 40 percent less radioactive than natural uranium in the environment. A soldier inside a Russian-made tank hit with a DU round gets more radiation from the tank's radium-dial instruments than he does from the DU. Soldiers with DU fragments in their bodies show no resulting health problems.

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Other important stories in the April Mercury include:

- Force health protection – keeping soldiers healthy so that they can do their jobs – is the AMEDD’s number-one job, writes LTG Ronald R. Blanck in his monthly column.
- The anthrax threat is real and the vaccination program is safe and prudent, writes Defense Secretary William Cohen in a commentary explaining why he ordered the vaccination program.
- The Army is experimenting with Battle Dress Uniforms impregnated with the insect repellent Permethrin. So far, the BDUs are doing very well in tests at Fort Polk, La.
- Got TRICARE questions? Send them to the MEDCOM TRICARE Division’s “tech support for your HMO” by e-mailing *TRICARE_help@amedd.army.mil*.
- Unique veterinary-pathologist section at Armed Forces Institute of Pathology helps field vets diagnose and treat animal diseases and also conducts research and training.
- Fort Drum, N.Y., MEDDAC’s Margaret Canale is named 1999 MEDCOM Health Benefits Advisor of the Year.
- DUSTOFF Association honors SFC Marvin Broadwater, 236th Medical Company (Air Ambulance), as DUSTOFF Crewmember of the Year; and the 1042nd Medical Company (Air Ambulance), Oregon National Guard, for the Rescue of the Year.
- Daughters of the American Revolution honor retired MG Spurgeon Neel. Neel helped pioneer helicopter medical evacuation and later helped found the AMEDD Museum.
- Dedication got former Army dental technician Jose Ortiz a degree in nursing and a commission in the Army Nurse Corps. Still more dedication took him to victory in the Hawaii Heavyweight Boxing Championship.
- MEDDAC Alaska medic Shawna Walker plays on Army’s first female All-Army soccer team in competition at Fort Eustis, Va.
- Good nutrition and increased physical activity are described as a “dynamic duo” in article from U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine.